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DEVELOPING WORD-CARD GAMES TO IMPROVE ENGLISH WRITING

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Abstract

Facing the English Language Teaching (ELT) challenges nowadays, the English teachers could facilitate language learning in effective and joyful ways by creating the word-card games for learning English. In this study, the writer would like to investigate whether the word-card games he designed and developed would be the effective strategy to improve students' vocabulary and grammar for writing. There were twenty-one students participating in this classroom action research. It is also essential to know how the English teachers could meet the needs and levels of competence and design the effective word-card games for learning English. It was unique to create four topics of the games, such as Synonyms, Antonyms, Degrees of Comparison, and Making Sentences by using the same cards, to apply pedagogical principles, and also to choose a scorer for each group to help conduct successful games. The word-card games also needed some continuous improvement by trying to play the word-card games with different respondents or players in order to gain necessary feedbacks to improve the shortcomings of the word-card games. In this study, most of his students or respondents gave positive feedbacks of the word-

card games for learning English especially for enhancing the joy of learning and strengthening their writing skill.

Keywords

ELT Challenges, Effective and Joyful Ways, Word-Card Games, Continuous Improvement

1. Introduction

Among the four English skills, writing has been regarded as the most neglected one in Indonesian schools. In this case study, the writer as the English teacher also faced some ELT challenges to know the abundant mistakes of the first-year students' writing. It was urgent to investigate the case of the first-year students of Business English study program of Politeknik Ubaya, Surabaya, Indonesia in order to find out the best solution on their English writing problem.

There were some known causes of the freshmen's difficulties on writing English sentences, such as their language competence level, the number of lesson hours, previous learning exposure, the aim of learning English, and the classroom size. As a matter of fact, first, these freshmen had the average TOEFL score = 438. In the Oxford Placement Test, this TOEFL score was considered as lower intermediate. Second, they learnt English for two lesson-hours per week (about 2 x 45 minutes per week) in their high school level. In the writer's teaching experience, learning English for two lesson-hours per week was still hard to cover the four English skills and to improve the students' proficiency. Third, their previous learning exposure to apply their English skills might not have solid foundation for further language learning. Fourth, the English teachers might focus on some English skills, such speaking, reading, and listening, so the high school students might learn a little on writing English skill. Fifth, the students usually learnt English in a big class size of above 30 up to 40 students which was not considered as an ideal number of students for the effectiveness of language learning. Therefore, they didn't acquire sufficient practice on writing English when they were in their previous schooling. It was not surprising if they had low foundation on their writing English skill.

Based on the previous research findings, the students of Business English study program of Politeknik Ubaya Surabaya had difficulties especially in vocabulary and grammar for writing English (Limantoro, 2016). These ELT challenges made the writer try to find out their learning solution. For this case, the writer would like to make the word-card games to help facilitate their

language learning. The writer expected that the word-card games for learning English could boost their learning passion. The purposes of making the word-card games were for improving the students' language components (vocabulary and grammar) and for helping them to write better English sentences. Therefore, the writer would like to have two research questions in this case study as follows:

- How could English teachers design a set of word-card games that could improve English vocabulary and grammar?
- Are the word-card games effective, challenging, and joyful (fun) for language learning?

In this paper, the writer would like to explain about how to design word-card games that could improve English vocabulary and grammar. By having adequate vocabulary and grammar, the students could write English skill better. In designing the word-card games, the writer would like to do three steps. First, he would like to do the needs analysis of the target students in order to select the most frequently used words that they needed. Second, he also had to make the games rules and instructions based some important learning principles, such as effective, challenging, and joyful (fun learning). Third, he also gave the finishing touch of the word-cards by making the most appropriate design for the word-cards and the boxes.

In the implementation stage, the writer also needed to collect data/feedbacks from the players/participants by using questionnaire and by discussing after they had played the word-card games. This reflection was important to make the word-card games meet the needs and the language competence level of the players, and the effectiveness for language learning. Therefore, the feedbacks were necessary for continuous improvements of the word-card games so that they boosted the players' passion on language learning. The reflection on the word-card games after the play/practice was one of the important feedbacks/data for continuous improvement in classroom action research. The English teachers could use the direct reflective approach after the players/students used the word-card games to ensure the sustainability of the qualities of the word-card games, such as the effectiveness, challenges, and fun of playing the word-card games for improving their language learning.

In designing the word-card games, the writer had to use some learning principles on playing the games for language learning as follows:

- Repeated principle of learning helped the players for better word-recognition. It meant that the more they played the word-card games, the better they achieved the desired results.
- Thinking hard and fast help the players to reinforce the words and grammatical patterns.
- Relaxed and joyful ways of learning would boost the learning passion. It meant that playing the word-card games in joyful atmosphere would help foster the players' learning.

2. Relevant Studies

The writer also used some relevant studies as the inputs of this case study. There were many strategies to improve the student writing skill, such as to improve student writing by using feedbacks as a teaching tool (Peterson, 2010) and by using short stories (Bartan, 2017). There were some studies on the word-card games for language learning but the word-card games mentioned on the study were unique for language learning because the word-card games covered four topics from one set of the word-card games that would be practical and economical. Further, there were also kinds of card games, such as one with the notion of one-size-fits-all model (Mertier, 2013), one that made the learners fully immerse themselves in learning used to promote recognition and memorization (Kusuma et al., 2017). and one as art media entertainment (Ferri et al., 2016). These card games were also used as strategies to improve vocabulary and grammar which became the important language components of the writing skill. The games-based learning could promote learning vocabulary effectively (Derakhshan and Khatir, 2015; Bakhsh, 2016; Silsupur, 2017; Wu, 2018). Applying the games made the learners become engaged and interested in learning grammar (Lien & Thi, 2017). Here, the writer would like to continue his previous research on practical strategies to improve the students' writing by using the word-card games.

3. How to Design Word-Card Games for Language Learning

There were twenty-one students of Business English Study Program of Politeknik Ubaya Surabaya Indonesia that participated in this research. And the writer would like to design Word-Card Games for learning English based on the respondents' problems, needs, and competence level. Here, the writer would like to design the word-card games for language learning in the following steps:

3.1 The First Step

The writer had to do the needs analysis to select the suitable words for the games. They had difficulties in writing English sentences because of their insufficient language components namely vocabulary and grammar. They had difficulties in having the right words to write (vocabulary) and in arranging/structuring the words to make correct and complete sentences (grammar). These difficulties could also be the ELT challenges. Based on the previous research, vocabulary and grammar could be the main sources of the problems of writing English sentences. The other causes of the problems of writing English sentences for the respondents were weak writing foundation of their previous schoolings, low competence (their average TOEFL score was 438), and monotonous and old ways of teaching and learning. The alternative solution of these problems was learning English by using word-card games to improve their vocabulary and grammar so that the learners were expected to write correct English sentences when they had sufficient vocabulary and grammar.

Further, for the choice of important vocabulary/words, the writer chose adjectives as the most frequently used part of speech that learners could use for playing four kinds of games, namely Synonyms, Antonyms, Comparison, and Making Sentences. The problems of designing four kinds of word-card games by using adjectives could be how the chosen adjective words could fit the four kinds of the games. Some words had most frequently used antonyms but they had less frequently used synonyms or not frequently used words for comparison. For example, the adjective word 'false' might have the synonymous words 'wrong' and 'incorrect' (frequently used words), and the opposite word 'right' and 'correct' (frequently used words) but the comparison (comparative and superlative words) of 'false' became 'falsier' and 'falsest' (considered as not frequently used words). Therefore, the writer had to choose the adjective words that could fit the four kinds of the games. It meant that the writer had to choose the most frequently adjectives and the chosen words/ adjectives could be compatible with the four kinds of the games - Synonyms, Antonyms, Comparison, and Making Sentences. By using these words, the learners were expected to start improving their vocabulary and grammar so that they could make correct and complete English sentences. The further games could also use the most frequently used words of the other parts of speech, such as verbs, nouns, and adverbs.

Furthermore, the writer would like to choose and list the most frequently used adjective words that could fit the contents of the four kinds of the word-card games as follows:

Table 1: The Scorers' Guide for the Word-Card Games

No.	Adjective Words	Synonyms	Antonyms	Comparison		Making Sentences
				Comparative	Superlative	
1	Hard	Difficult	Easy, light, gentle, soft	Harder	Hardest	Answers may vary
2	Difficult	Hard	Easy	More difficult	Most difficult	Answers may vary
3	Quiet	Silent, calm	Noisy	Quieter	Quietest	Answers may vary
4	Important	Necessary, essential	Unimportant, insignificant, trivial, inessential	More important	Most important	Answers may vary
5	Foolish	Stupid, dumb, silly, brainless, unintelligent	Clever, smart, intelligent	More foolish	Most foolish	Answers may vary
6	Clever	Intelligent, smart	Stupid, foolish, dumb, silly, brainless, unintelligent	Cleverer	Cleverest	Answers may vary
7	Old	Ancient, elderly, aged	Young, new, modern	Older/ elder	Oldest/ eldest	Answers may vary
8	Expensive	Costly, dear	Cheap, inexpensive, economical	More expensive	Most expensive	Answers may vary
9	Wealthy	Rich	Poor	Wealthier	Wealthiest	Answers may vary
10	Rich	Wealthy	Poor	Richer	Richest	Answers may vary
11	Happy	Glad, joyful, pleased, merry, cheerful, joyous	Sad, unhappy	Happier	Happiest	Answers may vary
12	Unhappy	Sad	Happy, merry, joyful, pleased, cheerful	Unhappier	Unhappiest	Answers may vary
13	Sad	Unhappy	Happy, merry, joyful, pleased, cheerful	Sadder	Saddest	Answers may vary

14	Fortunate	Lucky	Unlucky, unfortunate	More fortunate	Most fortunate	Answers may vary
15	Quick	Fast, rapid, speedy, brisk	Slow, gradual	Quicker	Quickest	Answers may vary
16	Fast	Quick, rapid, speedy, brisk	Slow, gradual	Faster	Fastest	Answers may vary
17	Lucky	Fortunate	Unlucky, unfortunate	Luckier	Luckiest	Answers may vary
18	Healthy	Well, fine, fit	Ill, sick, unhealthy	Healthier	Healthiest	Answers may vary
19	Cheap	Inexpensive, low price	Expensive, dear, costly	Cheaper	Cheapest	Answers may vary
20	Slim	Thin, slender, skinny	Fat	Slimmer	Slimmest	Answers may vary

3.2 The Second Step

The writer also had to make the game rules and the game instructions based on some important learning qualities of the game, such as effective, challenging, and joyful for learning.

3.2.1 The Word-Card Games Should be Effective

It meant that the word-card games could facilitate the purpose of the language learning to acquire vocabulary and grammar. The more the learners play the games, the better they would recognize and use the words in order to improve their vocabulary and grammar. At last, the players of the game could also learn the words from other players and know the correct answers from the scorer that would explain the correct answers of the word-cards. Each individual player could also learn words collaboratively. Further, the game would be effective if the players'/learners' gain could be achieved. Therefore, the writer would provide pre-test and post-test for the purpose to measure the gain/effectiveness of the games. Some players needed to do the games once to obtain all the words/vocabulary and grammar of the games but some others needed to do the games twice or more times to play the games for they had heterogeneous language competence.

Table 2: *The Results of the Pre-Test & Post-Test of the Word-Card Games*

Test	Game Topics			
	Synonyms	Antonyms	Comparison	Making Sentences
Pre	75%	95%	85%	80%
Post	100%	100%	100%	100%
The difference/the gain	25%	5%	15%	20%

In the table above, the writer would provide pre-test and post-test for the purpose to measure their learning gain from the games. There were twenty words for pre-test that the respondents/ students did before playing the games. After they had played each of the four games, their scorers also explained all the answers of the words that they did not know or they made mistakes. Then, the respondents/ students had to do the post-test. The difference between the post-test (after playing the games) and the pre-test (before playing the games) would be the result or the gain of the games.

3.2.2 The Word-Card Games Should be Challenging

Based on the previous research result, the level of difficulty of the words must be appropriate and a bit more difficult than the players' language competence so that they had challenges to think a bit hard on the words (Limantoro, 2012). If the words of the games were too easy for the players, they might not challenge to play. But if the words of the games were too difficult for the players, they might also not motivate to play. Therefore, the words of the game must be appropriate to the learners' age, language level, and prior learning and they had to be a bit more difficult than the student's competence .

Besides, the contents or the words of the game should be challenging, the length of the time to respond the game should also be adequate for the players to think a bit fast. The time for each player to respond the game should be enough. It meant that the time given for each player should not be too short or too long. If it was too short, the player didn't have enough time to think or respond it, but if it was too long, the player might think it longer and the other players felt bored to wait for the player that couldn't respond it. Therefore, the writer also tried out the games in different spans of time for giving responses, such as 5 seconds, 10 seconds, 15 seconds, or 20 seconds. In the process of trying out the games, at last the writer chose 10 seconds' time for responding each player's turn that would be considered as the best challenging time for this game. Nowadays, it was available to count the time by using the stop watch in the smart-phone. And the scorer of each group should use the stop watch for each player's turns when answering the word card.

3.2.3 The Word-Card Games Should be Played Joyfully (In a Fun Way)

The fun of the games could boost the players' passion to keep playing as well as learning. It was also important to know that language learners only succeeded of learning in a positive,

relaxed, and enjoyable experience because their emotions such as joy, excitement, and laughter could also promote learning (Tomlinson & Masubara in Limantoro, 2012).

Moreover, the other steps of designing the word-card games for language learning were making the game rules and instructions. The game rules were important to make the game run smoothly and on the right way. All players would understand the game rules so that they should commit to play the game based on the same regulations. Besides the game rules, the players should also know the game instructions so that they could play the game. And the rules and instructions of the word-card games could be explained as follows:

Example of the game rules and instructions on the game topic Synonyms

Purpose: to enrich/ strengthen vocabularies by knowing similar words

And the game rules could be explained as follows:

- The English teacher would be the facilitator who decides the groups and the scorer.
- There are four players and one scorer who participate in the game.
- The able student could be chosen as the scorer.
- The scorer duties are leading and moderating the game, and checking the players' answers whether they are correct or not. (The scorer is given the answer key of the games, if the scorer is doubtful about the correct answer, he/ she can ask the English teacher- in-charge).
- The scorer has to make sure that all players in the group understand the game rules and instructions and get the same numbers of chances to get the cards.
- All players play the game by taking turns (in clockwise direction) to take only one card each time.
- The scorer asks his/ her group to start and to end the game by clapping their hands to enhance the joy/ fun of the game.
- The players that get the most cards would be the winner(s). (the winners could be more than one player if they have the same numbers of the most cards).
- All players and scorers should have the fair play. The cheating one should be punished to miss one turn.

And the game instructions could also be explained as follows:

- The scorer shuffles the cards.
- The scorer asks all the players of his/ her group to clap their hands to start the game.

- A player takes one card to read by heart first, then to show it to the other players of the group.
- When the player takes the card, the scorer counts in ten seconds by using the clock app of the smart-phone, the player should give the correct similar word/ synonym. If the player can't find the correct synonym/ similar word after the second player counts to ten, the card should be given to the next player, then the next player has to do the same way as the previous player does. But if all players can't find the correct synonym/ similar word, the card(s) should be put aside. The scorer can tell the synonym but if the scorer doesn't know the correct word/ synonym, he/ she can ask the English teacher-in-charge there.
- When the game is over, the scorer asks the players of the group to clap hands. Then each player has to count how many cards they have got, and the most cards would be the winner(s).
- Before they play the real game, the teacher asks them to try out in their group(s) first.

3.3 The Third Step

Finishing touch of the games would also encourage the players to play the word-card games. The word cards should be designed in the most appropriate way, for example, the designer had to consider the size of the cards, the font size and letter type, the cards' color, and the design of the game boxes. So, the finishing touch of the word-card games could beautify their design and enhance the design quality of the word-cards.

To sum up, Setting up the game rules and instructions should be based on educational principles of language learning. These principles would be the qualities of the word-card games, such as effective, challenging, and joyful (fun). First, the designer of the game had to make sure that by playing the language learning games, the players could also improve their language components like vocabulary and grammar. From the pre-test and post-test of the game, the designer of the game could see the gain of the players to increase their vocabulary/grammar. Second, the other important game quality that the designer of the game considered was that the game was challenging for the players. It meant that the game level of difficulty would be a bit more difficult than the players' language competence. It would not be too easy or too difficult for them to think about the answers. Therefore, the user experience of implementing the games was very useful to know whether the game was challenging or not. Third, the other important game quality that designer had to consider was the joy/fun of the game. This quality would be the soul

of the successful games. The joy or fun of the games could also boost the players' passion to play the games. Moreover, in each step of designing the word-card games, the designer had to reflect on all of these designing processes and also ask their experts or the players on them for continuous improvements

4. How to Implement the Word-Card Games

The word-card games designed were implemented in a group of four with one scorer for each group. The players and the scorer had to understand and follow the game rules and instructions. Each scorer got the game guide that contained of the answer key of the games so that all scorers on all the groups could explain the correct answers of the games to their groups.

Before all players played the game, the scorer of each group would ask the players of the groups to clap their hands to enhance the joy of starting the game. The scorer would also shuffle the cards and ask the first player to take one card. After seeing the card, the player had to show the card to the other players. When the player took the card, the scorer counted the time (10 seconds) for each turn by using a stop watch in a smart-phone. If the player could give the right answer, the card would belong to him/her, but if he/she could not give the right answer, he/she had to give the card to the next player (in a clockwise direction) and so on. If all players could not give the right answer, the scorer would put aside the card on a certain place as the cards that could not be answered by all.

After the game was over, the scorer would help discuss the cards that could not be answered well by the players by using the game guide. During the game, the players should play themselves in a fair way. When a player cheated, he/she would be punished so he/she missed one round of the play. It meant that the players had to follow some education values, such as fairness, integrity, responsibility, and obedience. To end all the games, the scorer would ask the players for his/her group to clap hands again so that the teacher knew which group had finished the game.

After they had played all the four games, the teacher as the facilitator of the word-card games would ask the scorer to give brief reports on the difficult words from each group and the winners for each game in each group.

In this implementation stage, the writer also collected data about the players' opinions on playing the word-card games. The writer used a questionnaire and a Forum Group Discussion to

collect data on the benefits, difficulties, and their opinions on the games. These data would be analyzed as the findings for continuous improvement of the word-card games. In this stage, the user experience on the word-card games was very valuable to know whether the games were suitable and beneficial for them to improve their vocabulary and grammar so that they could write better English sentences.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 The Results of Implementing the Word-Card Games for Language Learning from Participants of Politeknik Ubaya

There were twenty-one students from Business English study program of Politeknik Ubaya Surabaya, Indonesia participating in the word-card games. The results of implementing the word-card games for language learning from the participants/students of Business English study program of Politeknik Ubaya Surabaya (see Table 2) as follows:

- In the game topic of Synonyms, the participants/players made the average mistakes about 25% of the total word-cards. It meant that they knew/recognized about 75% of the total word-cards but they didn't know/recognize about one-fourth of the total word cards.
- In the game topic of Antonyms, the participants/players made the average mistakes about 5% of the total word-card. It meant they knew most antonyms of the total word-cards (95%).
- In the game topic of Comparison, the participants/players made the average mistakes about 15% of the total word-cards. It meant that most of them (85%) knew/recognized the grammatical forms of comparatives and superlatives.
- In the game topic of Making Sentences, the participants/players made the average mistakes about 20% of the total word-cards. It meant that most of them (80%) could make correct English sentences.

5.2 The Results of Questionnaires and Forum Group Discussion

And the results of their questionnaires and Forum Group Discussion could be explained as follows:

- When asked whether the respondents enjoyed playing the word-card games, they replied that all of them (100%) enjoyed playing them because of some reasons, such as fun (76% of them) and challenging (57% of them).



- When asked which word-card game was the most difficult for them, most of them (81%) replied that the game of synonyms would be the most difficult one for them.
- When asked which word-card game was the easiest for them, more than half of them (76%) replied that the game of antonyms would be the easiest one for them.
- When asked whether they felt happy to learn English by playing the word-card games, almost all of them (95%) replied that they felt happy to learn English by playing them but a very few of them (5%) replied that the respondent was quite happy to learn English by playing them because these games were quite easy for the player.
- When asked whether they had ever played the games before, most of them (86%) replied that they had never played them before.
- When asked why they liked playing the word-card games, they replied that there were some reasons why they liked playing them, such as enriching their vocabulary and grammatical patterns, very interesting and challenging, forcing them to think hard and fast, not being a boring way to learn English, and enabling to memorize words easily.

5.3 The Results of Implementing the Word-Card Games from Other Players

The word-card games had also been implemented to other different players to gain more feedbacks from different perspectives. The other four players who played the word-card games and gave their feedbacks were as follows:

- Vocational high school students who took the internship at Politeknik Ubaya Surabaya.
- English teachers (kindergarten, elementary, high school, and university) from different schools in Surabaya.
- English course students from 'Rumah Bahasa' (translated into 'Language House') of the Municipal city of Surabaya.
- Indonesian labour workers (Tenaga kerja Indoensia) from PT Bangun Gunung Sari Gempol Pasuruan.

And the feedbacks on the word-card games from other players could be seen in the following table:

Table 3: *The Results of the Word-Card Games from Other Players*

No	Items	Vocational High School Students	English Teachers	English Course Students from Rumah Bahasa - Surabaya	Indonesian Labour Workers
1	Age	15 to 18 years old	24 to 52 years old	18 to 50 years old	23 to 38 years old
2	Number of participants	10	45	22	26
3	How many players enjoyed playing the word-card games?	60%	100%	95%	100%
4	Which one out of the four word-card games was the most difficult?	All games	None	Synonyms	Synonyms
5	Which word-card game was the easiest one?	None	All games	Antonyms	Antonyms
6	Have you ever played other games for learning/teaching English?	Never	42%	77%	Never

From the Table 3, the writer could discuss the important findings for the possibility of using the word-card games of other players as follows:

- Almost all the players from 15 to 52 years old enjoyed playing the games. But some vocational high-school students (40%) did not enjoy playing the games because of their personal reasons, such as they disliked their English lesson and they also had poor English words and grammar, therefore, these students had difficulty to play the four games.
- Among the four games, these respondents thought that the Synonym game was the most difficult one which was also in line with the result of the main respondents from the students of Business English Study Program of Politeknik Ubaya Surabaya Indonesia.
- English teachers who played the four kinds of the Word-Card Games thought that all the four games were easy for them. Those who had the English competence levels (advanced/

high intermediate) like the English teachers would also think that these four games were not difficult for them.

- Among the four games, the respondents thought that the Antonym game was the easiest out of the four games which was also in line with the result of the main respondents from the students of Business English Study Program of Politeknik Ubaya Surabaya Indonesia.
- Not all respondents played the language games for learning English before and less than half of the English teachers respondents (42%) used the language games for teaching English.

6. Conclusion

In this conclusion, the writer would like to highlight two important issues relating to the word-card games for improving English writing as an alternative solution tool for ELT challenges.

First, English teachers could also design a set of word-card games to improve their students' vocabulary and grammar so that they could also improve their writing skill. For example, they could design one set of word-cards fitting four topics of the games, such as Synonyms, Antonyms, Comparison, and Making Sentences. There would be some important processes of designing the word-card games. They would be:

- Selecting words that could fit the four topics of the games based on the students' needs.
- Making the game rules and instructions and making sure that the word-card games would have the game qualities of effectiveness, challenges, and fun (joy) for language learning.
- Finishing touch of the word-card games to enhance the beauty of the word-cards and boxes.
- Implementing to play the word-card games and doing reflection on the word-card games for continuous improvement.

Second, based on the results of the players/participants, the word-card games were effective, challenging, and joyful (fun) for language learning. The word-card games were effective to improve the student's language components. From the pre-test and post-test of the word-cards. There was the difference as the gain before and after the players played the games. And the word-card games were also challenging for players. The level of difficulty of the words was appropriate and a bit more difficult than their language level. They might still have some

difficulties on the four kinds of the games. Furthermore, the word-card games must also be appropriate to the learners' age, language level, and prior learning. And third, the fun or the joy of the games could also boost the players' passion to keep learning because their emotions, such as joy, excitement, and laughter could also promote learning.

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